


## Tips for Navigating Washington, DC Streets

**RALLY TIME!**

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1 months ago by Boof\_Bro  +83 / -0

I just wanted to share with you a few things I learned over the past several years working in the area that I think will be beneficial to those making the trip on 1/6:

Washington, DC streets are laid out in a manner that allows you to navigate without a map once you learn a few basic principals.

The streets are organized in a grid system that divides the city into four quadrants (NW, NE, SE, SW). If you picture a map of the city with an X and Y axis overlaid, they would intersect at the U.S. Capitol building (the origin). Capitol Street extends out in three directions from the Capitol Building - North Capitol Street, South Capitol Street, and East Capitol Street. The National Mall extends to the West toward the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial, paralleled by Constitution Avenue and Independence Avenue. The most important thing to know about navigating DC is that you must know which quadrant that you are in to communicate an accurate location. Every address and street in the city is followed by a suffix - NW, NE, SE, or SW. This information is crucial because there are similar intersections and addresses that may appear in each quadrant, with the only difference being the quadrant suffix.

Most of the streets in the city run either vertically (North-South) or horizontally (West-East). Fortunately, the city's planners thought of a logical way to organize these streets that will greatly aid you in navigation.

Let's start with the vertical streets that run North-South. Vertical streets are numbered and increase as they progress away from Capitol Street. Looking at the map, you will notice a 1st Street, 2nd Street, 3rd Street, etc., both to the left/West and right/East of Capitol Street. The further you go away from the Capitol in either horizontal direction, the higher the street numbers will go.

Now let's look at the horizontal streets that run East-West. These streets start out lettered (A Street, B Street, C Street, etc.) in alphabetical order going away from the Capitol in either vertical direction. Note that there are no J, X, Y, or Z Streets. This would get you approximately 22 blocks away from the Capitol, so what happens after that? The horizontal streets to the North at least switch to one-syllable names which follow the same alphabetical progression. After they run through the alphabet again they switch to two-syllable names, and then three-syllable names. The further out you go the more exceptions you will find to the rules, as some neighborhoods that were absorbed into the city had their own naming systems at one point in history.

Addresses on each street give you an approximate distance away from the Capitol. For example, 525 A Street NE is located about 5 blocks to the East, between 5th Street and 6th Street, in the Northeast quadrant. A street is the first letter of the alphabet, so we know it is one block North of East Capitol Street. 560 13th NW is located 13 blocks to the West of the Capitol, and about 5 blocks to the North between E and F Streets. We know this because E is the 5th letter of the alphabet, and would denote the 500 block. Knowing this information will also allow you to approximate distance and navigate between two points in the city.

cannot stress this enough. For example, let’s say you are at the intersection of 7th Street and E Street. This information alone could place you at one of four locations on the grid system. In the event of an emergency the last thing you would want is to have the police or fire department dispatched to the wrong quadrant of the city, potentially miles away from where you need them. The correct way to communicate your location would be “at the intersection of 7th Street NE and E Street NE”.

Like I mentioned previously, there are plenty of exceptions to the rules. The biggest example is streets that are named after states. These streets run diagonally in every direction. The most famous of these is Pennsylvania Avenue which connects the White House to the Capitol, and continues Southeast. Take some time before traveling and study a map of the city so you are familiar with what I explained above. I hope this provides you with a little more confidence and situational awareness when you make the trip to our nation’s capital.

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7

▼ Who is saying don't buy a map? I simply laid out the logic behind the street organization system so people have some situational awareness of where they are so that they (hopefully) won't need to walk around staring down at a map/phone while moving throughout the city.

The best plan is to have some awareness of what I stated above, along with a good mobile map and a backup printed map. They make good laminated pocket maps that I'm sure you can find all around the city.

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